

Testimony presented by Marcia DuFore
On behalf of North Central Regional Mental Board
Before the Appropriations Committee
Department of Social Services (DSS) budget
February 14, 2014

IN SUPPORT OF
H.B. No. 5030 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR
ENDING JUNE 30, 2015

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished Senators and Representatives of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Marcia DuFore. I am testifying as Executive Director of the North Central Regional Mental Health Board (NCRMHB). Our Board's responsibility is to study the mental health needs of people in our region and assist the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) with setting priorities for improved and expanded services to meet those needs. Our constituents include people who use behavioral health services, their families and concerned citizens in the towns and cities where services are delivered.

We appreciate and thank you for your efforts and those of the Governor for the attention you have maintained on critical mental health services that maintain a safety net for some of our most vulnerable citizens.

We would like to speak about of some of the proposals in the Department of Social Services (DSS) budget for FY 2015 that are aligned with our efforts and that continue in a positive direction of investing in our communities and the lives of our constituents. We also wish to express concern about the current state of affairs at DSS and the serious impact it has on of our constituents.

We urge your support for the proposal to maintain higher reimbursement levels for primary care physicians who serve people covered by Medicaid. This is a big deal -- we often hear from our constituents that they cannot find a physician who will take Medicaid. We understand the dilemma for Connecticut physicians. They tell us that they can only afford to serve a certain number of patients at a rate significantly below the cost of care. Meanwhile, although we are thrilled for our constituents who will, as the result of Medicaid expansion,

finally be able to afford basic medical care, this only works if they can find a physician who is willing to treat them. Again, we urge your support. And please understand that these rate increases cover only primary care. There is a whole other level of rate adjustments that are needed to ensure adequate access to psychiatric care. What a wonderful world it would be if we had reimbursement rates that would help us fill that gap in our service system.

We urge your support for the addition of new staff for the Department of Social Services. We hope this is a step in the right direction to address processing delays for applications, hours-long wait times trying to contact the department offices and other access barriers to receiving appropriate benefits. You have heard many stories tonight and we anticipate you will hear more before the end of this evening. We hear those same stories. Some that really concern us are those that relate to the experience of people who are signing up through Access Health CT, our healthcare marketplace. Some of those stories are from people who finally find themselves eligible for Medicaid having worked with an Assister. The Assister is working under contract with Access Health CT to support people through the process of enrolling in health care coverage through Access Health CT. After meeting with their Assister and enrolling in Medicaid the person receives a determination that he or she is eligible. But when people attempt to follow through to access services with their new benefit, they can find themselves denied for service with no proof of eligibility. So, they call back to their Assister for help. The Assistors tell us that they then have to call DSS and ask them to pull the scanned information that is already in their possession and ask them to process it. They tell us that, otherwise, nothing will happen in a timely way with that information. Assistors know this. DSS staff know this. Our constituents are feeling the affects of this. Meanwhile, the Assister contracts will only continue through the end of March. How do we ensure that DSS will be caught up by then and that enrollment in the healthcare exchange will run smoothly? We keep hearing that CT is leading the nation in it implementation of healthcare reform. We urge your support for adequate staffing and support to make that a reality. What a wonderful world it would be if we could.

I hope you will consider these our comments in your deliberations.

We do thank you for your time, interest, and attention.

Sincerely, Marcia DuFore